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Historical Society of Palm Desert

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The Hourglass

Community
Service
Collections
Archives

SUMMER 1997 VOL. 5, NO. 2

A GRATEFUL COMMUNITY HONORS EDWARD DOUGLAS MULLINS, JR.

Genial, kind, generous, a gentle man.....even Webster would have run out of adjectives had he known him.....devoted to family and to the City of Palm Desert. Ed was loved and admired by all.

Edward Mullins, Jr. was born on September 15, 1918 in Wingo, a small town near the Mississippi River in western Kentucky. In his boyhood he worked in his father's drug store and decided to follow in his dad's footsteps and become a pharmacist. In 1941 he received a Bachelor of Pharmacy degree from the University of Tennessee. After graduation Ed's name was one of the first drawn in the draft for World War II. He served in the U.S. Army Air Force Medical Department. He climbed in rank from Lieutenant to Captain and after five years, 1940 to 1945, he was discharged as a Major. Over the years, some of the employees at the pharmacy would jokingly and lovingly refer to Ed as "Capt. Boss."

Ed moved to the Coachella Valley in 1948 and bought a drug store in Palm Springs. Then the decision to move to Palm Desert: "...because I felt it will someday be the heart of the Coachella Valley. I think Palm Desert is one of the nicest and friendliest places I've ever lived in." The highway through Palm Desert was only two lanes in 1949 and was subject to washouts when a cloudburst would hit the hills behind it. Shadow Mountain Club and most of the streets were still a series of surveyors stakes. The "drag" was a half-mile long and served almost 1000 residents.

In September 1951 Mullins opened a pharmacy in Palm Desert with partner Charley Hughes. This store was located on the roadway parallel to Highway 111 near Larkspur Lane. Mullins' only commercial neighbors were Jerry Malone's service station, Edith Eddy Ward's real estate offices, and Christine's shop. They started out with five employees and a pharmacist. "It was a shoe box operation," Ed admitted. Books were kept in a shoe box and charges were often written up on napkins. Workers weren't just employees, they were friends, and most of them stayed on for years. In 1964 there were 600 charge accounts on the books and by 1982 the store had 3000 computerized accounts.

When the shop first opened in Palm Desert, the fountain business was much bigger than the pharmacy business. This can be explained by the fact there were no eating places and only one doctor to write prescriptions in the slowly developing desert village. Both locals and celebrities enjoyed gathering at the pharmacy's popular soda fountain, including Ike Eisenhower, John Kennedy, Edgar Bergen, Brian Donlevy and William Boyd. Eventually, Ed sold the soda fountain portion of the establishment to a local businessman who turned it into Keedy's Fountain Grill, which still does business under that name along Highway 111.

In the late 50s and early 60s, Palm Desert experienced some growing pains. Ed was one of the moving forces behind the Palm Desert Boosters Association, out of which was born the local Chamber of Commerce. He and Cliff Henderson, were the sparks that got groups working. Ed served on the first Planning Commission. In 1976 Mullins swept the field to beat the other 13 candidates running for City Council....receiving a total of 1312 votes. Mullins had the people's interests at heart when he said, "We want to maintain the village atmosphere of friendliness, but with the sophistication of a modern city." He had dreams too: "I have always

wanted to tie all of the cove areas together with a highway of palms, lighted at night, from Palm Springs to Coachella or even further."

Mullins was a community activist, he lived the Rotary Club's creed "Service above Self" and contributed mightily to many organizations and causes. None was closer to his heart than our Historical Society on whose board he was actively serving at the time of his death. Other organizations in which he held honored positions and received awards were: Living Desert Reserve, Community Blood Bank, California Pharmaceutical Association, Bowl of Hygea, Cliff Henderson Founder's day Award in 1985, Palm Desert Chamber of Commerce, Coachella Valley Humanitarian Award, Palm Desert Rotary's "Citizen of the Year," and Riverside County Senior Inspiration Awards.

This dear man died on April 26, 1997 at Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage at the age of 78. Viewing at FitzHenry Funeral Chapel on April 30 and the funeral mass at Sacred Heart Church on May 1 was attended by hundreds of mourners. Tributes by Jean Benson, city councilwoman; Del Sharbutt, radio personality; and Dan Callahan, past president of the Historical Society, all testified to Ed's central role in the development of Palm Desert.

His quiet, unfailing, unflappable application to duty, his ever positive outlook and his affection for people combined to grace his efforts with success. As a family man, a successful business man and a community builder without peer, he leaves a deep imprint on the City of Palm Desert and in the hearts of his fellow citizens. Thank you, Ed, and thanks to your family for sharing. You'll be missed more than words can say.

New Members

Don & Duchess Emerson
Robert & Pearl Leland
Jacqueline Doyle
Jean & Bill Moffatt
Pat & Peg Donovan

New Life Member

Mrs. Randolph Scott

Thanks to those who have upgraded to Business ($50) or Contributing ($100 or more) categories:

Lynda C. Anderson
Bill & Hazel O'Neill
Adele Ruge North
Robert & Juanita Owen
Camille H. Speer

As a non-profit organization, our Society relies upon membership dues and we are exceedingly grateful for the renewals which demonstrate continuing support.

Because many senior Society members live here without nearby relatives, a bequest to the Historical Society of Palm Desert placed in a will or trust will remind surviving family members of ties their loved ones held dear. For information about making such a bequest, please call the office at 346-6588.

Remembering a Modest Giant

The Historical Society of Palm Desert Board of Directors has voted to establish a memorial fund in the name of Ed Mullins. Many suggestions have been received for appropriate recognition of Ed's lifetime achievements. At this early date $600 has been received.

Of Interest to History and Pre-History Buffs
Archaeology Comes Alive in the Desert

On May 3 the Coachella Valley Archaeological Society co-sponsored a successful symposium, a FIRST EVER in the desert. Topics included: local rock art, the ancient fish traps, artifact discoveries, the Salton Basin, Toro Canyon, "Stonehenge of La Quinta" and more. This active Society has monthly meetings, publishes a CVAS newsletter, and mans booths at public functions. It is compiling materials for outreach to local schools. It plans a series of Occasional Papers; Paper #1 is now for sale. To contact, the address is: Coachella Valley Archaeological Society - P. O. Box 2344 - Palm Springs, CA 92263 - Phone: (760) 773-2277

Fire Engine #1 Back in the Bay
Ready for the park, parades, programs, photos, etc.

Sincere thanks to Dick Blackstone for restoration of our antique engine. His many hours of painstaking work (covered by cost of parts with a very nominal charge for labor) has resulted in sturdy function -- "good for another forty years" is how Dick puts it. First, he dismantled and cleaned EVERYTHING. Because of the unavailability of some parts, Dick was forced to make rings and other items. He expanded pistons and bored cylinders .....conversation with Dick runs to such matters and to valve seats, exhausts, batteries, insulation, etc. We could not be more grateful for his Herculean labors.

Portola Community Center - Preparation of Plaque

In March of 1996 the Palm Desert Library moved to the multi-agency site at Fred Waring Drive on the College of the Desert campus. There, city/county/college entities now serve the needs of both desert area residents and COD students.

A wonderful, new community resource has been fashioned at the Portola site and is aptly named Portola Community Center. At present there are four organizations which occupy office space: Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Barbara Sinatra Children's Center, Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy, and Episcopal Community Services. There is also an attractive main meeting room available to community groups which meet eligibility for group rentals. With chairs and equipment now on order, capacity will expand to seat 125, or 50 for seating at tables. Use of the Center is being administered by the C. V. Recreation & Park District. For information call Laura Webster at 568-2560.

A history of the original library has been compiled by Society consultant, Jan Holmlund. The Historical Society of Palm Desert is preparing a plaque to be placed in the building.

The early history details unsuccessful efforts in 1950 in persuading Riverside Public Library to locate a branch library in the desert. Subsequently, two Palm desert residents, retired physician Dr. Edward Ruge and pastor Dr. Martin Baker, found that the county would provide books and a part-time librarian if space and equipment could be made available.

Cyria Henderson, elected president of the Palm Desert Women's Club in 1954, pledged funding assistance if Dr. Ruge would lease a suitable site. Room was found at the Larkspur Lane Patio. Mrs. Henderson signed up local organizations for varying support pledges of $15, $10 or $5 monthly to meet the rent of $60 per month.

A library committee composed of appointees from the pledging clubs held a meeting in January 1955, with Dr. Ruge as the chairman. Albert Lake, Riverside City Librarian, attended and stated that personnel would be provided for a 15-hour week at $60 per month. Dr. Ruge and his friends built shelves, a desk, painted, papered and cleaned the small rental room. Circulation reached 645 books per month by early 1956.

That same year Randall and Cyria Henderson, sharing a deep interest in the cultural life of the community, offered to donate a large site on Portola Avenue. Construction of a community hall-library was proposed, with the stipulation that it always remain in perpetuity a site for community activities.

There is much more of interest in this history which is incorporated in the Society archives. Of special significance to a comprehensive early history of the Palm Desert Library was the collection of Hal Kapp. Our archives describe the roles played by individuals and organizations in bringing library plans to fruition.

A distillation of this information results in the following wording for the plaque which will be placed at the newly designated Portola Community Center:

PALM DESERT PUBLIC LIBRARY 1963-1996
Architect: John Outcault Landscaping: Charles Darland
Library Site Donated by: Randall and Cyria Henderson
Original Building: Dedicated March 23, 1963
The Randall Henderson Memorial Wing: Dedicated October 5, 1974
Palm Desert Community Library erected by The Palm Desert Community Library Association, Inc.
With Private Funding
Directors:
Phil Franklin, Edna Henderson, Ben Arnold, Marge Brown, Mary Ellsworth,
Gertrude Keedy, James Griffin, Carl Henderson, Randall Henderson, Hal Kapp
Guarantors:
Marge Brown, Harry Cannon, Carl Henderson, Clifford Henderson, Carl Jensen,
Richard Kite, Hal Kapp, John Moon, John Outcault, Ted Smith, Ed Welcome
Palm Desert Community Library Deeded to the City of Palm Desert - March 1977
Palm Desert Community Library Removed to a New Location - March 9, 1996

WE MISS THEM -- Phil Harris, Honorary Mayor of Palm Desert in 1982, died in 1995. He is pictured here with Bob Keedy who left us just last year. The occasion: Keedy's 30th anniversary in 1987.

A 40th Anniversary at Keedy's Fountain Grill

This is a PERSONAL INVITATION from Bob and Patty Downs:

Where: Keedy's Date: Monday - June 30, 1997 Time: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

A buffet lunch, drawings, prizes and general festivities will be offered. In other words, it is celebration time again at that landmark eatery known simply as Keedy's. It is a homey place where locals mingle and tourists drop in to get a flavor of how things used to be. The shirts of employees proclaim it "a blast from the past." The original ambience and spirit has been preserved by the Downs, owners of the restaurant since 1987.

You never know who you may see at Keedy's. In the 50s and 60s it might be Bing Crosby or Hopalong Cassidy.....today it might be Kaye Ballard or other Hollywood luminaries now living in the Coachella Valley. Patty has commented about the variety of customers who come in for hamburgers, old-fashioned milk shakes and malts. "A ditch digger will come in for breakfast and sit next to a stocks and bonds man," she said. Caroline Berkey, a board member of the Historical Society, says when her grandchildren come to visit, their first request is to go to Keedy's.

Bob Keedy's son, Doug, of Tustin and daughter, Barbara, of the Indio ranch will be on hand to greet folks on the 40th anniversary. Please drop by to enjoy the Down's hospitality and say "Hi" to old friends. It will be a happy occasion!

1997 So-Cal Sister City Conference

The City of Palm Desert hosted this conference at the Embassy Suites Hotel on May 16-18, 1997. Eleven workshops consisting of panels covered a variety of relevant topics: Special Needs of the Community, Golf as Industry/Recreation, Drive Electric Vehicles!, Cultural Exchanges, Economic Development, Ecotourism, Art in Public Places, Public/Private Partnerships, Mountain Conservancy, International Business and Environment. Palm Desert's sister cities are Gisborne, New Zealand and Osoyoos, British Columbia, Canada.

Rheo Lawman, Honoree
Founder's Day, 1997

The Founder's day award, made annually for the past dozen years by Marian Henderson, is a surprise presentation. The Desert Sun headline on an item which appeared prior to the event was indeed prophetic; "Good Citizen Lauded on Founder's Day" it stated. Rheo Lawman has fulfilled the role of good citizen with warmth and dedication since moving to Palm Desert almost 50 years ago. Both Mrs. Henderson and Jean Hollenbeck, president of the Historical Society, cited Rheo for outstanding service. A handsome display board with photos and articles chronicling Rheo's many activities also was brought out for viewing.

Printed by courtesy of El Paseo Ad Council

This excellent likeness of Founder, Cliff Henderson, was done by his friend and famed cartoonist, Milton Caniff.

A pioneer in many respects, this vibrant woman was born in South Dakota and grew up in the Carmel area of California. Rheo was appointed publisher of the Palm Desert Post in 1975, a position she held until retirement in 1980. For 13 years before taking charge at the Post, she had been with the Press-Enterprise in various capacities.

Rheo was one of the organizers of the Palm Desert Chamber of Commerce Women's Division in 1970 and served as founding president. She also held the post of state director of the California Women in Chambers of Commerce.

Rheo is a former president of the Coachella Valley chapter of Soroptimist International and later became active in the Palm Desert chapter. She held membership in the Twin Cities Press Club. She is a Life Member of the Big Horn Institute, the Living Desert and the Historical Society of Palm Desert. Passionate in her advocacy of the big horn and a talented home gardener, Rheo's interests are wide ranging.

In her gracious acceptance of the Founder's Day award, she reminisced about Palm Desert as a quiet little city in 1954. She recalled the three tries at city incorporation and her involvement in unification efforts. She is gratified that now there is less talk of north/south and more feeling of unity as Palm Desert has prospered and grown into its premiere position in the valley.

The "Hourglass" Sifts - or Flows?
Congratulations

Jeannie Ahrens was recently honored as a Woman of Distinction by Soroptimist International of Coachella Valley. She worked at Sun World International for 19 years as Intellectual Properties manager for all trademarks and patents. She maintained a worldwide system of plant-patent and trademark protection for a $30 million portfolio. Her community activity includes the Living Desert, Historical Society of Palm Desert and the Soroptimist Club.

Alice Faye Harris was honored at the Joslyn Senior Center. Actress, singer, dancer, Alice and her late husband and beloved entertainer, Phil Harris, were supportive of many causes. The annual Arthritis Foundation Celebrity Golf Tournament which bears their name grows in popularity each year. It is a main fund raiser for the desert chapter of the Foundation.

Cook Street/I-10 Interchange

On May 9, 1997 the Cook Street interchange completion was celebrated with a ribbon cutting ceremony and was opened to traffic later in the day. After 16 months of work and a $14 million dollar price tag, Coachella Valley residents will have the convenience of easy access to the freeway and less conjested traffic.

Cook Street was named for Caleb Cook, who was truly one of the founding fathers of the Coachella Valley. He arrived by springboard wagon in 1913 when there were no paved roads or electricity. Caleb moved from Los Angeles, where he was an electrical manufacturer, to the Indian Wells area where he eventually established a 60-acre ranch where he grew deglet noor dates. In 1981 the Vintage developers wanted to change the name of Cook Street. The Historical Society of Palm Desert was successful in stopping them....in holding on to history.

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The old fire station was bulging on Founder's day. Thanks to all of you who came and, especially, to Ginny Mullins and to Janice May, Ed's daughter. Dan Callahan paid tribute to Ed Mullins and directed attention to an impressive display of the many plaques and awards Ed received through the years. Excellent photographs added to the nostalgia.

The office will continue to be open during May and June on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. During July and August, the Historical Society office will be closed; however, we will continue to monitor phone messages.

Several of you expressed interest in having a membership badge. Please call the office at 346-6588 or PRINT your name as you wish it to appear and send it with $5.00 to the Historical Society, P. O. Box 77, Palm Desert, CA 92261. Order your badge now and be ready for Fall get-togethers.

Best wishes for a pleasant summer!

"Hourglass" Editor, Theda Lundquist